

*Authors Letter to the Council President Calling for Appointment of Impartial Panelists*

July 18, 2010

MEDIA, PA – Today, Congressman Joe Sestak (PA-07) sent a letter to the President of the UN Human Rights Council insisting that, if an investigation is conducted, only impartial, unbiased panelists be appointed to review the facts surrounding the May 31 flotilla incident off the coast of Gaza. President Phuangketkeow is currently in the process of recruiting investigators.

“The loss of civilian life in any case is tragic,” said the Congressman. “In this case, the ship carrying humanitarian and construction supplies attempted to break a naval blockade of Gaza despite clear warnings that that they would be denied entry. While the Palestinians have a right to humanitarian assistance, Israel has a legitimate right to defend itself by preventing dangerous materials from getting into the hands of Hamas.

“I supported the Israeli government’s decision to quickly appoint an independent commission, with foreign observers, to review the circumstances that surrounded this tragic event. If the UN is to probe this incident as well, it is essential that the investigation is conducted in an objective manner.

“Unfortunately, the language of the resolution authorizing the UN investigation was needlessly harsh and one-sided. A biased investigation would not only fail to bring closure to this tragic incident, but it might also impede the latest round of peace talks toward a sustainable two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

The full text of the letter is as follows:

The Honorable Sihasak Phuangketkeow

President, United Nations Human Rights Council

c/o Permanent Mission of Thailand

5 Rue Gustave-Moynier

1202 Geneva, Switzerland

Dear President Phuangketkeow,

I write to express concern about potential bias in the selection of panelists for the United Nations Human Rights Council's investigation into the incident in the Mediterranean Sea on May 31. I urge you to be vigilant to ensure that the panelists selected are independent, free of bias, and fair to all parties involved.

I unequivocally support Israel's right to self-defense. The naval blockade of Gaza, which is supported by international law, seeks to keep weapons and potentially dangerous materials from entering Gaza that could be used by Hamas terrorists to attack and kill Israeli civilians. When Israel learned that Insani Yardim Vakfi (IHH), otherwise known as the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief, a group with reported ties to terrorist organizations, planned to challenge the blockade, they offered to transfer the supplies into Gaza through the port of Ashdod, where the cargo could be inspected for potential contraband. Unfortunately, the organizers of the flotilla refused this compromise and a bloody confrontation ensued. Regrettably, nine activists were killed, and the loss of life was tragic.

Shortly after the incident, the Human Rights Council wrongly condemned Israel's actions in extremely harsh terms. I believe that such actions, when taken before the facts are even known, lead to an interpretation of anti-Israeli bias and fail to provide the necessary objectivity. Because of this flawed condemnation, it is important that you ensure that the panelists who investigate the incident do not have preconceived notions of the events.

I am further concerned that a biased report would derail the proximity peace talks that recently

reconvened. I strongly support direct talks between the parties, encouraged by the United States, in order to bring about a sustainable two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It would be a tragedy if the United Nations report interfered with encouraging progress towards this most important end.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Joe Sestak

Member of Congress

*Born and raised in Delaware County, former 3-star Admiral Joe Sestak served in the Navy for 31 years and now serves as the Representative from the 7th District of Pennsylvania. He led a series of operational commands at sea, including Commander of an aircraft carrier battle group of 30 U.S. and allied ships with over 15,000 sailors and 100 aircraft that conducted operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. After 9/11, Joe was the first Director of "Deep Blue," the Navy's anti-terrorism unit that established strategic and operations policies for the "Global War on Terrorism." He served as President Clinton's Director for Defense Policy at the National Security Council in the White House, and holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy and Government from Harvard University. According to the office of the House Historian, Joe is the highest-ranking former military officer ever elected to the U.S. Congress.*